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RRB Customer Service Plan Update

The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board's Customer Service Plan promotes the principles and objectives of customer-driven quality service agency-wide. The Board's plan states specifically the level of service that customers can expect, and an important part of the plan is a pledge to keep beneficiaries informed of how well the Board is meeting the plan's standards. The plan is reviewed and updated periodically as the Board gains more experience with it, compares its service with the best in business and considers feedback received from its customers.

The following questions and answers provide information about the Railroad Retirement Board's performance in the key areas of railroad retirement, disability and survivor benefit payments, plus railroad unemployment and sickness benefit payments, and the handling of correspondence during Fiscal Year 2000 (October 1999 – September 2000).

1. What standards were used by the Board in Fiscal Year 2000 for processing applications for railroad retirement employee or spouse annuities?

The Board's Customer Service Plan provides that if you filed for a railroad retirement employee or spouse annuity in advance, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 35 days of the beginning date of your annuity. If you have not filed in advance, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 65 days of the date you filed your application.

Of the cases processed during Fiscal Year 2000, 94.3 percent of employee and 96.8 percent of spouse applicants who filed in advance received a payment, or a decision, within 35 days of their annuity beginning date. Average processing times for employee and spouse applications were 11 and 6.4 days, respectively.

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Also, of the cases processed, 96.9 percent of employee and 92 percent of spouse applicants who had not filed in advance received a payment, or a decision, within 65 days of their filing dates. In these cases, the average processing times for employee and spouse applications were 24.2 and 26 days, respectively.

2. What standards were used by the Board in Fiscal Year 2000 for processing applications for disability annuities under the Railroad Retirement Act?

The Board's Customer Service Plan provides that if you filed for a railroad retirement disability annuity, you will receive a decision within 105 days of the date you filed your application. If it is determined that you are entitled to disability benefits, you will receive your first payment within 25 days of the date of the Board's decision, or the earliest possible payment date, whichever is later.

Of the cases processed during Fiscal Year 2000, 63.6 percent of those filing for a railroad retirement disability annuity received a decision within 105 days of the date they filed an application. The average processing time was 94.7 days. Of those entitled to disability benefits, 94.1 percent received their first payment within the Customer Service Plan's time frame. Average processing time was 7.4 days.

3. How did the Board's performance in the area of survivor benefits measure up to its standards in Fiscal Year 2000?

Under the Board's Customer Service Plan, if you filed for a railroad retirement survivor annuity or a lump-sum benefit, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 65 days of the date you filed your application, or became entitled to benefits, if later. If you are already receiving a spouse annuity, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 35 days of the date the Board receives notice of the employee's death.

Of the cases processed during Fiscal Year 2000, 78.3 percent of the applicants for an initial survivor annuity received a payment or a decision within 65 days. In addition, 93.7 percent of the applicants for a lump-sum benefit received a payment or a decision within 65 days. In cases where the survivor was already receiving a spouse annuity, 93.8 percent of the applicants received a payment or a decision within 35 days of the Board being notified of the employee's death. Average processing time for all recurring applications was 21 days. The average processing time for lump-sum applications was 16 days.

4. What were the standards for the handling of applications and claims for railroad unemployment and sickness benefits and how well did the Board meet these standards?

Under the Board's Customer Service Plan, if you filed an application for unemployment or sickness insurance benefits, you will receive a claim form, or a decision, within 15 days of the date you filed your application. If you filed a claim for subsequent biweekly unemployment or sickness insurance benefits, you will receive a payment, or a decision, within 15 days of the date the Board receives your claim form.

During Fiscal Year 2000, 98.8 percent of unemployment benefit applications and 99.3 percent of sickness applications processed met the Board's standard. Average processing times for unemployment and sickness insurance applications were 1.7 and 3.3 days, respectively.

In addition, 99.7 percent of subsequent claims processed for unemployment and sickness benefits met the Board's standard for Fiscal Year 2000. Payments are issued within two business days of processing. The average processing time for claims was 4.8 days.

5. How well did the Board meet its standard for replying to correspondence in Fiscal Year 2000?

The Board's standard provides that when you inquire by letter, you will receive a reply within 15 days of the date the Board receives your inquiry. If for any reason the Board cannot reply within that time frame, it will acknowledge the letter and tell you how long it will be before your questions can be answered fully.

In Fiscal Year 2000, 97.6 percent of all correspondence the Board received was responded to, either with an acknowledgement or with a final reply, within the standard.

6. How did the Board's performance in meeting its standards in Fiscal Year 2000 compare to its performance in Fiscal Year 1999?

For Fiscal Year 2000, performance versus the customer service standards remained at the same high level when compared to Fiscal Year 1999 performance.

Performance improved from Fiscal Year 1999 levels for retirement applications, initial survivor applications, survivor conversions, sickness insurance applications, unemployment and sickness insurance claims, disability decisions and disability payments.

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The most marked improvement came in the rendering of disability decisions. For disability applications processed in Fiscal Year 2000, 63.6 percent of applicants received a decision within 105 days of their filing dates as compared to 50.6 percent in Fiscal Year 1999; and the average processing time for decisions improved to 94.7 days, as compared to 116 days last year.

Even with this significant improvement, it must be remembered that the processing of disability applications requires medical evidence and related documentation to establish entitlement; and obtaining this material can be a lengthy process. The Board continuously seeks improvements in collecting the required documentation to provide accurate and more timely handling of disability applications.

Only in the handling of lump-sum death benefits, unemployment applications and correspondence were there very slight declines in performance from Fiscal Year 1999, (0.1 percent, 0.2 percent and 0.1 percent, respectively). Even with these minimal declines in performance, the Board still exceeded its Annual Performance Plan targets for the handling of lump-sum death benefits and unemployment applications.

7. Can beneficiaries provide feedback to the Board about the service they receive?

A Customer Assessment Survey form is available in every field office allowing beneficiaries to evaluate the service they received and suggest how the Board can improve its service. Persons not satisfied with the service they received may contact the manager of the office with which they have been dealing or the regional director who is responsible for that office. Their names and addresses are available in each office.

The addresses and phone numbers of all the Board's field offices are also available on the Board's Web site at www.rrb.gov or by calling the toll-free RRB Help Line at 1-800-808-0772. The RRB Help Line is an automated telephone service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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